



Higher National Qualifications (China)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018

Financial Services

Introduction

As a part of the qualifications verification process for Financial Services, verification activities were carried out involving 21 centres in China in the academic year 2017–18. This report covers verification completed in October 2017, March 2018 and May 2018 either as a result of a verification visit or remote verification. The Financial Services units verified during these activities are as follows:

DE5M 34	Financial Sector: An Introduction
H0BX 34	Personal Financial Services
DE5T 35	Financing International Trade
H0BW 35	Financial Services Regulatory Framework
H9AM 35	Investment
H9NC 35	Pension Provision
H9ND 35	Principles of Insurance
H2F2 35	Personal and Business Lending
H0Y6 34	Financial Services Graded Unit 1
H0Y7 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 2
H7VA 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 3

The standard of evidence presented for verification continued to show the overall improvement seen in the last few years. Centres are to be congratulated for all their efforts in continuing to try and improve their delivery, support, assessment and verification activities to ensure they meet and then maintain the required standards. It was very encouraging to note there were no issues with the security of assessment instruments this year. Assessors continued to develop their skills in applying professional judgement when making assessment decisions and it was good to see that there were almost no misunderstandings of the standards required for each unit.

While many centres achieved high level of confidence outcomes in all the units verified, there are still centres that continue to have issues with more than one unit during verification. It is disappointing to have to report that yet again, the underlying cause of almost every assessment and verification issue was that assessors or internal verifiers were not undertaking sufficient personal development to ensure they had kept up to date with the subject they were assessing/verifying. There were no difficulties in centres understanding the required standards as written in the unit specifications, but in the absence of an assessor or internal verifier being aware of the underpinning current legislation, products and services, assessment and verification decisions are unlikely to be valid. As was the case last year, this report will highlight where a lack of recent subject-specific knowledge impacted on the validity of evidence in several of the criteria. Resolving this issue is something that centres should address because until they do so, despite all efforts in assessment and verification, the outcomes of verification events will not meet the required standard.

Category 2: Resources

Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.

The comments made last year are unfortunately having to be repeated again for this criterion. Until centres take the required steps to ensure their assessors and internal verifiers complete appropriate continuing professional development activities every year, in every subject they assess or verify, problems will continue with centres not meeting the required standards.

There are two different types of updating/CPD activity. Staff should be completing both types of CPD — updating on the principles and practices of assessment and verification **and** updating their subject-specific knowledge in the units they are involved in teaching, assessing and/or internally verifying. It is not sufficient to do the first type of updating without also doing the second.

There was evidence that centres had been making greater use of the materials on the SQA China website and disseminating materials from the 2017 conference. There was however only very limited evidence of the Understanding Standards materials being used as part of standardisation activities which would have been very relevant CPD to complete to update techniques in assessment and internal verification. Despite minutes stating conference materials are being disseminated, there was evidence from only a few centres that those who attend the centre's dissemination event reflected on what they learned and considered how they could apply this learning in their assessment/verification practices. As was highlighted last year, all this reflection is required and, when it is completed, it should be recorded on each individual assessor/verifier's CPD record.

It has to be emphasised that keeping subject knowledge up to date is the responsibility of **every** assessor and internal verifier. In those centres where there were issues with the validity of assessment and/or verification decisions, the source of the issue was not that the assessor/verifier did not understand the standards, it was because they were making decisions based on out-of-date subject knowledge. Subject updating CPD cannot be ignored and it is the responsibility of the individuals involved in assessment/verification to make this happen. Not completing CPD is always going to lead to difficulties in making valid assessment decisions but it is a requirement that can easily be addressed.

Subject-specific knowledge can be kept up to date by regularly reading relevant financial services websites. Assessors/internal verifiers should also be proactive in looking for updates — for example, they should automatically assume there will be changes to content impacted by changes to income tax rates therefore, as a matter of course, should be researching this and making the necessary changes every year.

In addition to income tax changes which impacted on Financial Services: Graded Unit 2 and Pension Provision, some assessors/internal verifiers had not kept up to date with the changes to Senior Managers and Certification regime which impacted on the Financial Services: Regulatory Framework unit.

Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.

All centres continue to pay a lot of attention to undertaking reviews of the equipment and classroom environments producing very detailed documentation showing completed inventories and reviews.

Many centres have a checklist that includes a requirement to confirm that there has been a review of the learning and assessment materials. These reviews always indicate that this has been completed, but unfortunately, yet again it was noted that there was insufficient review of the learning and assessment materials in some centres. Too often, despite the existence of confirmation that materials had been reviewed, PowerPoint materials being used in teaching contained out of date or irrelevant material. This was most prevalent in Personal and Business Lending where some centres have still not changed their materials from those used in the previous unit (H0C0 35) which was replaced in 2016. As a result, learners are being taught content that is no longer assessed and there is insufficient coverage of the outcomes which were enhanced during the unit revision. Centres should be ensuring that those who complete these pre-delivery checklists understand that review means checking that the content of every slide, handout and chapter of the student learning guide meets the current unit specification and is up to date and, where changes are required, that these are actioned in all relevant materials. Checking that the materials exist without checking content is not sufficient.

For 2018–19 three units have been revised — Financial Services: An Introduction, Financial Services Regulatory Framework and Financial Services: International Transactions (which replaces Financing International Trade). Centres will decide when they will switch to the revised units, but all centres will have to use them from August 2020 at the latest. When centres deliver these new units, they must revise all their learning and formative assessment materials as their materials for the previous units will not prepare learners for the assessments they will have to complete.

Category 3: Candidate support

Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.

SQA has prescribed IELTS standards for candidates and as well as confirming all leaving the foundation year meet this requirement. All centres offer additional support to candidates whose English is weaker.

Several centres are using the unit Personal Development Plan to encourage candidates to identify their prior achievements and development needs and to set objectives to address those needs with support from the centre.

Good practice continues to be seen in some centres that have been offering modules to help candidates develop their numerical analysis skills.

Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.

All centres have now ensured that candidates have scheduled one-to-one contact with their assessor at least once a semester in addition to group tutorials. Assessors are also available via WeChat and text to support their candidates.

Although there is contact, several centres are still trying to hold all the support meetings by setting aside only a few days and requiring the assessor to complete a large number of back-to-back meetings with a short time of up to 10 minutes allocated to each candidate. This is not ideal as it is very difficult for assessors to effectively manage the time over the day and may restrict how much support can be given to those candidates who need most help.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.

It was good to see that in several centres, the internal verifiers were continuing to complete their verification activities to a high standard and that detailed and informative records of the discussions between the assessor and the internal verifiers at each stage of the verification process were being completed. These records will be very useful documents to inform future assessment and verification decisions as they are making it clear what decisions were taken and why that option had been decided on.

However, in many centres, there is still not enough attention paid to internal verification. Although most centres are now using the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit and the example documentation contained in it, there were still issues where the outputs of a centre's internal verification was a series of forms ticking everything was in order with no comments or indication of any discussions relating to the assessment instruments or assessment evidence verified. Almost all the centres that had to complete action plans relating to this criterion had completed these checklists and records in this limited way, which highlights the problems this more superficial approach will deliver.

In addition, in several centres, there was no indication on the candidates' assessments that the internal verifier had reviewed the assessment, although the checklists indicated they had. Internal verifiers should, as a minimum, be initialling every assessment checklist that they review. In addition, their report should include details of their findings on a candidate-by-candidate basis.

As has been mentioned before, over a larger sample of assessments it is extremely unlikely that an internal verifier will have no issues with every question in every assessment. External verifiers know from their own assessment experience that there will always be marginal decisions, especially when reviewing assessments of candidates completed under closed-book time-controlled conditions. An indication by the internal verifier that an assessor needs to reflect again on their assessment decision in a question should not be assumed by centres to be a criticism of the assessor. It highlights that there can be more than one perspective on whether the standards required have been met. Where good practice was seen, it came from centres where those differences of views were noted and there was a record of joint discussions between the assessor and internal verifier showing the questions where some reflection was needed and the decisions reached. These records also form very useful standardisation records for subsequent year's assessment decisions.

A review of the reasons why many centres had action plans for this criterion revealed that the root cause of a centre's problem was not that they were unaware of the principles of internal verification or their centre's procedures. The problem, which has been discussed already under criterion 2.1, was that the internal verifier had not kept up to date with the subject that they were verifying. As a result, they failed to identify that an assessment instrument was not up to date and did not contain questions/solutions based on current regulations, products and services. The impact of a lack of current subject-specific knowledge continued when the internal verifier

was reviewing the assessor's decisions as they were not able to detect where the assessor had accepted candidate responses that did not reflect current regulations, products and services.

The attention paid to standardisation activities in centres remains variable. In some centres good standardisation takes place based on the current assessment instruments prior to the marking beginning and there are clear records of the standardisation meetings and any decisions made. A few centres had used the SQA Understanding Standards materials to support their standardisation work and this is good practice. All centres should be conducting standardisation activities and documenting their decisions and where there are Understanding Standards materials available these should be part of the resources used. Previous years' assessments can also help with these activities.

Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.

All the assessment instruments selected by the centres were valid and were either SQA CASPs or centre-devised instruments that had been prior verified previously. It was good to note that centres had paid much more attention to ensuring that they had re-assessment instruments in place before candidates sat their first summative assessments. Centres were also much more proactive in clarifying understanding of standards with SQA very early in the semester where pre-delivery internal verification had identified possible areas of difficulty with an instrument.

There were some delays still in candidates being offered re-assessment opportunities and several centres were still not taking account of the impact of the spring break when completing their assessment plans and the timelines for assessors and internal verifiers to complete their activities. This is something that needs to be addressed as it is unfair to expect candidates to complete an assessment in November/December but not to offer them re-assessment until March/April.

Several centres had taken onboard the recommendations of last year's report and had reviewed the timing of the Graded Unit 2 examination. Other centres are reminded that the Graded Unit 2 examination should be scheduled for early in semester 2 at the latest where the underpinning units have been studied in semester 1.

Almost all the centres were now applying appropriate professional judgement while making assessment decisions, particularly in relation to making the decisions on re-do and re-assessment. There were some examples of some very good records of discussions agreeing the application of professional judgement between assessors and internal verifiers.

However, in isolated instances, centres were still basing their assessment decision of whether a candidate should be given a re-do or re-assessment on a mathematical formula based on the number of questions answered correctly. Centres were again reminded they should be basing all assessment decisions (including whether a candidate should be given a re-do or re-assessment) on their professional judgement having reviewed the appropriate standards and not on a mathematical formula.

Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.

There were no issues identified with the security of assessment instruments and all the assessments reviewed were accepted as being the candidate's own work. There was also no evidence of the over-teaching of candidates that had been seen in previous years. This is a very welcome improvement and centres are thanked for their efforts in this connection.

There was good evidence in some centres' internal verification reports that they had been diligent in identifying plagiarism in the completion of Graded Units 1 and 3, and collusion during the closed-book examinations.

Good practice was seen in one centre where software is now being used to assist the centre detect plagiarism in project-based assessments.

Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.

The accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions continues to improve. Assessors were making much better use of their professional judgement to determine if the standards had been met. There was less evidence of overgenerous application of professional judgement this year. However, it would be good practice if internal verifiers and assessors were more diligent in recording what the reasons were for a decision when they applied professional judgement.

There was very little evidence of inconsistency in assessment decisions in centres. However, some centres did continue to have issues in making accurate assessment decisions. The reason, discussed in detail under 2.1, 2.4 and 4.2 above was that the teachers/assessors involved had not updated their own subject-specific knowledge. It was highlighted last year that this updating issue impacts on four verification criteria and is a fundamental one to address. This updating is still not happening. No amount of development activities related to Understanding Standards and practice marking exercises will remove this issue; relevant subject-specific CPD is the only answer.

In Financial Services Graded Units 1 and 3, this lack of subject knowledge meant that some centres were asked to re-mark assessments. For both these units, assessors and internal verifiers should consider researching and preparing answer tables to help them make assessment decisions in advance of starting to assess projects. In Graded Unit 1, this table could include details of current savings products offered from a range of retail banks. In Graded Unit 3, as there are only a few FTSE100 retail financial services companies, a table could be prepared covering the range of share prices, current investment and financial performance data, savings products and complaints procedures for each company. The preparation of these tables will involve assessors/internal verifiers in some personal research so this work can, of course, be added to their CPD records.

In Financial Services Grade Unit 2, a few centres had to be asked to re-mark because they were being over generous with their marks, particular in the sections on the Financial Services Regulatory Framework, Pension Provision and Principles of Insurance. In this unit, centres must

see explanations from the candidates for each part of the answer to the question. It is not sufficient for answers to be only definitions of terms or sections of documents. There also has to be explanations of what these terms or sections mean for the customer.

Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.

All centres retain their evidence for periods well in excess of the SQA requirements.

Criterion 4.9: Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.

All centres were able to produce lists of staff signing for having received a copy of the qualification verification report. However, staff meetings are still not taking the opportunity to use this information to fully inform future assessment and verification activities and enhance quality.

During their meetings at the start of the semester, centres are continuing to focus on the arrangements for the future administration of the programme and not reflecting on the lessons learned from the previous year's delivery and verification of the units and the changes that the centre has to make to their teaching, assessment and verification practices. Some centres are overlooking recommendations made in the reports. Recommendations should be reviewed and their implementation should be progressed or, if it is not appropriate to do make the changes suggested, the reasons why should be recorded and be available for future verification events.

In addition, there is still only limited evidence of assessors and internal verifiers reviewing and discussing the content of the qualification verification reports and using these to inform practice to enhance quality.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2017–18:

- ◆ The use of personal development plans, prepared by candidates, which are reviewed during one-to-one contact with the assessors.
- ◆ The use of software to support centres' efforts to detect plagiarism.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2017–18:

- ◆ The completion and documentation of relevant subject-specific CPD by all assessors and internal verifiers for every unit they are involved in delivering, assessing and/or verifying.
- ◆ The annual review and updating of learning materials for each unit to make alterations based on changes learned about during the subject-specific CPD.
- ◆ The timing of assessment and re-assessment delivery should be reviewed to take account of the date of the spring break holidays.
- ◆ The completion of internal verification reports at each stage of the process should be more extensive and not confined to ticking checklists.
- ◆ More attention should be paid to standardisation activities with greater use being made of the Understanding Standards materials for those units where they exist.
- ◆ The content of this report (QVSR) should be reviewed and discussed by the subject team (that is all involved in the delivery, assessment and verification of Financial Services units) and changes made to centre activities based on the lessons learned.